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CONTROL AND LIMITATION OF DOCUMENTATION

Note by the Secretary-General

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The General Assembly, in paragraph 12 of its resolution 2538 (XXIV) of 11 December 1969, requested the Secretary-General to prepare a short document setting forth in clear terms the policies laid down by the Assembly regarding the control and limitation of documentation and to make it available to members prior to each session of a council, board, commission, committee or other body. The document requested by the General Assembly was issued first on 4 February 1970 (A/INF/136) and brought up to date yearly thereafter. The present note, which takes into account policy decisions adopted by the General Assembly up to the end of 1991, is being distributed to all Member States as an Assembly information document and will also be made available at the opening of each session of a United Nations body.

2. The General Assembly has on numerous occasions adopted resolutions calling for restraint on the part of delegations in requesting reports, studies and meeting records and has asked the Secretariat to draft documentation as concisely as possible. The main resolutions in which it has stated its policy on specific types of documentation are the following:

Resolution No.	Date
1272 (XIII)	14 November 1958
2292 (XXII)	8 December 1967
2538 (XXIV)	11 December 1969
2836 (XXVI)	17 December 1971
3415 (XXX)	8 December 1975
31/140	17 December 1976
32/71	9 December 1977
33/56	14 December 1978
34/50	23 November 1979
35/10 B	3 November 1980
36/117 A to D	10 December 1981
37/14 C	16 November 1982
38/32 E	25 November 1983
39/68 D	13 December 1984
41/177 D	5 December 1986
42/207 C	11 December 1987
43/222 C and E	21 December 1988
44/196 B and C	21 December 1989
45/238 B	21 December 1990
46/190	20 December 1991

3. The policies stated in these resolutions have, for the most part, applied to the documentation of the General Assembly and of its subsidiary bodies. However, the General Assembly has invited other United Nations organs, in particular the Economic and Social Council, and subsidiary bodies such as the Trade and Development Board, to apply the same policies to their own documentation and to that of their subsidiary bodies. Those organs have, in general, accepted the policies laid down by the General Assembly with such further detailed instructions to their subsidiary bodies as their particular circumstances required. Notable among such actions have been Economic and Social Council resolutions 1979/1, 1979/41, 1979/69, 1981/83, 1982/50, 1982/105, 1988/77 and 1989/114, and decisions 1983/163, 1983/184, 1985/200, 1987/179, 1988/101, 1989/174 and 1991/295.

II. DECISIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

4. The specific recommendations contained in the General Assembly resolutions enumerated in paragraph 2 above which remain in effect are set forth below.

A. General

5. The General Assembly in its resolution 2538 (XXIV), paragraph 1, appealed to all United Nations organs, bodies and committees to consider ways of reducing documentation and, in particular, the possibility of adopting a form of records less voluminous and less costly than that currently being used.

6. The General Assembly, by resolution 33/56, section II, paragraph 1, urged all intergovernmental bodies:

(a) To bear in mind the need to keep their requests for documents to the minimum compatible with the efficient conduct of their work and within the limits of the available resources of the Secretariat;

(b) To review all their recurrent documents to determine whether those documents have become redundant, have lost their usefulness or could be issued at less frequent intervals;

(c) To endeavour to prepare as brief reports as possible.

7. The General Assembly, in resolution 36/117 A, section II, paragraphs 6 and 7, requested its subsidiary organs:

(a) To reduce the number of requests for additional documents and to attempt to limit the number of reports required to cover any one subject of specific concern to a given organ;

(b) To consider inviting the Secretariat to make brief oral statements in lieu of written reports, in particular progress reports, at the outset of each session.

8. The General Assembly invited, in its resolution 2538 (XXIV), paragraph 8, the Governments of Member States to restrict both the number and the volume of the documents submitted for processing to what was strictly required by resolutions and other statutory decisions of a United Nations organ or was clearly relevant to agenda items under discussion, and to exercise restraint in submitting lengthy documents to be distributed as documents of the United Nations. Thereafter, in its decision 38/401, the General Assembly urged all Member States and subsidiary organs to exercise maximum restraint in requesting circulation of material as official documents of the Assembly. By resolution 41/177 D, the General Assembly added to that exhortation that, where circulation of communications was desired, Member States should as far as possible request it under cover of a note verbale in the official languages of submission. Moreover, in paragraph 1 of resolution 38/32 E, the Assembly recommended to Member States that they take into consideration the aim of limiting to a minimum requests for the preparation of reports or the circulation of documents. In resolutions 43/222 C and 45/238 B, the Assembly renewed its appeal to Member States to exercise restraint in their requests for the circulation of communications as United Nations documents and to keep their submissions as brief as possible.

9. The Secretary-General was requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 33/56, section II, paragraph 2:

(a) To draw the attention of intergovernmental bodies to areas where duplication of documentation is likely to occur and/or where opportunities for integrating or consolidating documents that deal with related or similar themes might exist with a view to rationalizing documentation; 1/

(b) To follow the necessary administrative and managerial procedures to ensure the scheduling, preparation and submission of documents in good time;

(c) To circulate eight weeks before the opening of a meeting of an intergovernmental body, with the annotated agenda of the meeting, a report on the state of preparedness of all the documents for the session, in all languages, at that time [this request was reiterated most recently in resolution 46/190];

(d) To take measures to ensure that pre-session documents for meetings shall be distributed not less than six weeks before the meetings, in all languages [this request was reiterated most recently in resolution 46/190];

(e) To bring to the attention of intergovernmental bodies, at the time decisions are being adopted, any request for documentation that exceeds the ability of the Secretariat to produce such material on time within its approved resources and to give due explanations;

(f) To continue to apply to all action-oriented documents prepared by the Secretariat for intergovernmental meetings a limit of 32 pages, in accordance with internal instructions of the Secretariat [the limit was later fixed at 24 pages in accordance with ST/AI/189/Add.20/Rev.1 of 24 February 1982];

(g) To develop systematic training programmes for staff in the Professional category and newly recruited staff who are required to produce documents, with a view to securing a consistent drafting standard and to improving drafting skills.

10. The General Assembly, in its resolution 36/117 A, section II, paragraph 8, decided that lists of all documents requested by each United Nations organ, including the Main Committees of the Assembly, should be submitted by the Secretary-General at the end of each session, with an indication of the date on which it would be possible to issue each document in all required languages, reflecting the time required for its preparation by both the substantive and conference-servicing units of the Secretariat. That decision was reaffirmed in paragraph 4 of General Assembly resolution 39/68 D.

11. The General Assembly also decided, in resolution 36/117 B, paragraph 1, that documents should be given effective simultaneous distribution in sufficient time in the official and working languages of the organs of the United Nations. In resolution 42/207 C, the Assembly requested United Nations bodies and the Secretary-General to ensure respect for equal treatment of the official languages of the United Nations and requested the Secretary-General to continue to ensure the full application of General Assembly resolution 36/117 B. In resolutions 43/222 E and 44/196 C, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to implement resolution 42/207 C.

12. By decision 37/445 of 21 December 1982, the General Assembly endorsed the recommendation contained in the annex to Economic and Social Council resolution 1982/50, to the effect that the Council and the Assembly should continue to review the provisional agendas for their subsidiary bodies, together with the list of requested documentation, in order, inter alia, to establish greater consistency in the documentation requested and its orderly consideration at the intergovernmental level.

13. Thereafter, in resolution 39/68 D, the Secretary-General was requested:

(a) To instruct all Secretariat units responsible for the drafting of documents to ensure that their manuscripts were delivered to the Department of Conference Services in accordance with the prescribed timetable for their submission [ST/AI/189/Add.23];

(b) To circulate eight weeks before the opening of the session of each United Nations organ, including the Main Committees of the General Assembly, a report on the state of preparation at that time of all the documents in all languages required for the session;

(c) To include in that report an explanation for any delay in processing the documentation and to identify the Secretariat unit responsible for that delay.

14. In paragraph 25 of resolution 46/190 of 20 December 1991, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General and the Executive Heads of United

Nations programmes and funds and secretariats of United Nations organs to ensure that each official document carried on its front page and in an appropriate manner the dates concerning the following stages of the documentation process: issuance by the substantive Department; completion of the translation into the specific langauge; printing; issuance.

B. Meeting records

15. In paragraph 2 of its resolution 3415 (XXX) of 8 December 1975, the General Assembly endorsed a number of criteria which had been proposed by the Secretary-General concerning the provision of records of the proceedings of the bodies and organs of the United Nations, bearing in mind that the production of meeting records was not only costly but often competed with and caused dislocation in producing in time other more essential documentation for meetings.

16. The main criterion was that records should continue to be provided to the principal organs of the Organization but that in respect of subsidiary organs of the General Assembly a more limited and selective approach should be encouraged.

17. In view of the considerable further savings which were involved, the General Assembly also decided that, rather than issuing records first in provisional form and in limited distribution and subsequently in final form, including corrections submitted by delegations and in general distribution, the summary records of the Main Committees and subsidiary organs of the General Assembly and of the sessional committees of the Economic and Social Council* should be issued in full only once, in general distribution and subject to the subsequent issue, in the form of a consolidated corrigendum relating to the totality of meetings held during a session or other stated period, of revisions requested by delegations.

18. Other criteria laid down on that occasion were:

(a) In the event of the establishment of any new subsidiary organ of the General Assembly, records would not be provided unless the related resolution contained an express decision that the nature of the proceedings warranted them;

(b) Subsidiary bodies of the General Assembly should cease to be provided with meeting records of any kind other than sound recording;

(c) The principal organs other than the General Assembly should be invited to observe the same criteria in deciding whether records should be provided for their subsidiary bodies;

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* Discontinued through 1992; see footnote 2.

(d) Subsidiary bodies otherwise entitled to receive meeting records for all or some of their meetings should be required to dispense with them when meeting away from recognized United Nations conference centres;

(e) Summary records should be limited to 15 pages per meeting of 2 1/2 to 3 hours, and efforts should be made to reduce the summary records of subsidiary bodies to 10 pages per meeting of the same duration. (Since summary records issued only once in final form, subject to correction, are now typed in single spacing, the current limits are 10 and 7 pages, respectively.)

19. At its thirty-fourth session, the General Assembly, by paragraph 2 of its resolution 34/50 of 23 November 1979, decided that a number of resolutions adopted by the Economic and Social Council earlier the same year (resolutions 1979/1 of 9 February 1979, 1979/41 of 10 May 1979 and 1979/69 of 2 August 1979) should be applied to the Assembly and its subsidiary organs as well. In the last-cited resolution the Council had decided to discontinue, for an experimental period of two years, the provision of summary records for all its subsidiary organs. 2/ In deciding to follow a similar course of action for its own subsidiary organs the General Assembly did so on the understanding that:

(a) The discontinuance of summary records for its subsidiary organs should apply during an experimental period of one year only, at the end of which the Secretary-General would report to it at its thirty-fifth session on the experience gained;

(b) During that period the International Law Commission and the Committee of the Whole Established under General Assembly Resolution 32/174 would continue to receive summary records (see A/34/PV.76 and decision 34/418).

20. Subsequently, the General Assembly, by its resolution 35/10 B of 3 November 1980:

(a) Confirmed the continued applicability of its resolution 34/50 in respect of summary records for all those subsidiary organs of the General Assembly for which the provision of summary records was discontinued, for those organs which had not received summary records prior to the adoption of resolution 34/50 and for those organs which were to be established in the future, unless explicit exceptions were approved by the Assembly;

(b) Decided to grant exceptions from the rule set forth in paragraph 1 of the resolution (see subpara. (a) above) subject to review at the thirty-sixth session of the General Assembly on the basis of recommendations of the Committee on Conferences and in the light of experience gained, to the following subsidiary organs:

(i) Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People;

(ii) United Nations Council for Namibia;

(iii) United Nations Commission on International Trade Law and Legal Subcommittee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space for sessions devoted to the preparation of draft conventions and other legal instruments;

(iv) Special Committee against Apartheid;

(v) Special Committee on the Charter of the United Nations and on the Strengthening of the Role of the Organization;

(vi) Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean, when holding preparatory sessions for the Conference on the Indian Ocean envisaged in General Assembly resolution 34/80 B of 11 December 1979.

At the same time, those organs were requested to keep their requirements for summary records, whenever possible, to a reasonable minimum and to dispense, whenever possible, with meeting records.

21. In section II, paragraphs 1 and 2, of its resolution 36/117 A of 10 December 1981, the General Assembly requested the Committee on Conferences to undertake, on a priority basis, a comprehensive study of the rationale that currently determined the provision of meeting records to the United Nations organs, with a view to identifying criteria for the selection of organs that should receive records in the future and, in that connection, to take fully into account the potential offered by new technologies; and further requested the Committee to submit to the Assembly at its thirty-seventh session appropriate recommendations in connection with the above and with Assembly resolution 35/10 B of 3 November 1980.

22. By resolution 37/14 C of 16 November 1982 (para. 3), the General Assembly decided that, for an experimental period of three years, none of its subsidiary organs should be entitled to summary records, with the exception of those listed above in paragraph 20 (b) (i), (ii), (iii), (iv) and (vi) and the International Law Commission. In section III of resolution 40/243 of 18 December 1985, the General Assembly decided that those arrangements should remain in effect until it took further action on the subject and, by resolution 41/177 D of 5 December 1986, it decided to extend the experimental period for a further three years. This experimental period was again extended for a further year under paragraph 1 of Assembly resolution 44/196 B of 21 December 1989.

23. The General Assembly also decided, by paragraph 4 of resolution 37/14 C, that summary records should continue to be provided to regular and special sessions of governing bodies of the United Nations organs and programmes listed hereunder, and to pledging conferences or meetings of ad hoc bodies established for the announcement of voluntary contributions by States:

(a) Board of Trustees of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (in English only);

(b) Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund;

(c) Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees;

(d) Governing Council of the United Nations Development Programme;

(e) Industrial Development Board; 3/

(f) Trade and Development Board.*

24. At the same time, the General Assembly decided that the exceptions granted to bodies named in the last two paragraphs should not apply to any of their subsidiary organs (para. 5) and should not apply to meetings away from recognized United Nations conference centres unless there was a specific decision by the Assembly to the contrary (para. 9). The Assembly also confirmed that summary records should not be provided to special conferences and their preparatory organs, with the exception of legal codification conferences, for which the needs would be determined in each case (para. 8), and reaffirmed that any further exception would require the explicit approval of the General Assembly (para. 6).

25. Also by resolution 37/14 C, the subsidiary organs entitled to meeting records were requested to keep their requirements to a minimum, to dispense with them whenever possible, and to make wider use of sound recordings (para. 7). For the benefit of organs no longer entitled to meeting records, the Secretary-General was requested to arrange for sound recordings to be made available to interested delegations (para. 10).

26. The General Assembly subsequently decided, by resolution 41/177 D, that pledging conferences and meetings of ad hoc bodies established for the announcement of voluntary contributions by States should no longer receive summary records, invited the Military Staff Committee to consider dispensing with verbatim records and invited the governing bodies of the United Nations organs and programmes designated in paragraph 23 (a), (b), (c) and (d) to reconsider their needs for summary records. In resolution 44/196 B, the Assembly took note of the decision of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research to discontinue its request for summary records.

27. By resolution 45/238 B, the General Assembly requested the Committee on Conferences to continue to review the provision of summary records on a regular basis and to report thereon to the Assembly as appropriate. It also decided that, pending a further decision of the Assembly on the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences, no subsidiary organ of the

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* At its 652nd meeting, on 21 September 1984, the Trade and Development Board decided to dispense with summary records for its subsequent plenary meetings.

General Assembly would be entitled to summary records, with the exception of the following:

(a) Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean;

(b) Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People;

(c) International Law Commission;

(d) Legal Subcommittee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space;

(e) Special Committee against Apartheid;

(f) United Nations Commission on International Trade Law.

28. In the same resolution, the Assembly decided that summary records should continue to be provided to regular and special sessions of the following governing bodies of United Nations organs and programmes:

(a) Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund;

(b) Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees;

(c) Governing Council of the United Nations Development Programme.

29. In resolution 37/14 C, the General Assembly confirmed the entitlement of the following subsidiary organs to verbatim records and reiterated that no such organ would be so entitled in the absence of an explicit resolution by the Assembly to that effect (para. 11):

(a) Committee on Applications for Review of Administrative Tribunal Judgements;

(b) Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space;

(c) Disarmament Commission;

(d) Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples;

(e) Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Population of the Occupied Territories (when hearing witnesses);

(f) United Nations Administrative Tribunal (when holding hearings, only in the language of the speaker);

(g) Committee [now Conference] on Disarmament (from full statements as delivered and checked by the delegations concerned but without the use of verbatim reporters);

(h) Subsidiary organs of the General Assembly when holding meetings in the observance of international days of solidarity proclaimed by the Assembly.

30. The pattern of meeting record entitlements currently in force is provided in annex I to the present document.

C. Statements

31. The General Assembly approved the recommendation of the Secretary-General set forth in resolution 2292 (XXII), annex, paragraph (b), and reaffirmed by resolution 31/140, section II, paragraph 5, and resolution 2538 (XXIV), paragraph 10 (e), to the effect that speeches or statements by representatives of Governments, by the Secretary-General or his representative, or by persons presenting reports on behalf of committees or other bodies might be reproduced in extenso in summary records or as official documents only if they served as bases for discussion, provided that the relevant decision was taken by the body concerned after a statement of the financial implications had been submitted in accordance with regulation 13.1 of the Financial Regulations of the United Nations.

32. Thereafter, by decision 35/401, maintained and reiterated each year, it was decided that inasmuch as all Main Committees of the General Assembly were provided with meeting records, the reproduction in extenso, as separate documents, of statements made in a Main Committee should be discontinued. That decision was extended to all subsidiary organs of the General Assembly entitled to summary records by resolution 38/32 E, paragraph 8.

D. Reports and studies

1. Reports of subsidiary organs

33. By resolution 2836 (XXVI), of 17 December 1971, the General Assembly decided that reports submitted by subsidiary organs or bodies should be drafted on the basis of the following principles (see para. 3):

(a) The reports should be action-oriented and concise and should contain precise information confined to a description of the work done by the organ concerned, to the conclusions it has reached, to its decisions and to the recommendations made to the organ to which it is reporting;

(b) Introductions containing background information should, as far as possible, be confined to matters of substance rather than procedure and should contain only what it is essential to bring to the notice of the organ to which the report is addressed;

(c) The account of the deliberations should be concise and should be supplemented, as necessary, by cross-references to the meeting records; verbatim or summary records of an organ, or extracts therefrom, should not be included in its report;

(d) Texts available in easily accessible documents should not be incorporated in or annexed to the report; in particular, verbatim or summary records, working papers or extracts therefrom should not be included as annexes;

(e) Texts which are not easily accessible should not be annexed when their substance can reasonably be incorporated in the main body of the report;

(f) Participants should not be listed by name, unless they are serving in their individual capacity;

(g) Where appropriate, reports should include a summary of the proposals, conclusions and recommendations contained therein.

34. The General Assembly had earlier recommended in resolution 2292 (XXII), annex, paragraph 1, that reports of subsidiary bodies should be submitted in good time so that the issue of those reports first in provisional form and later in final form might be avoided.

35. By resolution 2836 (XXVI), paragraph 9, the Main Committees of the General Assembly were requested, when considering items on their agenda which involve the submission of annual reports of subsidiary organs or of the Secretary-General, to review whether such reports could be submitted at less frequent intervals.

36. Thereafter, the General Assembly, in paragraph 25 of decision 34/401, stated that no report of its subsidiary organs should contain a compilation of other previous documents. The Assembly added, in paragraph 26, that subsidiary organs should not annex to their reports summary records of their meetings or other material already distributed to all Member States. Subsequently, in paragraph 7 of resolution 38/32 E, the Assembly called upon its subsidiary organs not to reproduce in their reports the full text of earlier resolutions relevant to their work, but instead, as a frame of reference, to include a list of relevant documents in their reports, giving the exact titles and symbols.

37. In paragraph 2 of its resolution 34/50 of 23 November 1979, the General Assembly decided upon the application to its subsidiary bodies of the revised guidelines for the format and contents of their reports (see annex II), which the Economic and Social Council, by its resolution 1979/69 of 2 August 1979, had accepted for its functional commissions and standing committees. It was understood at the same time that particular subsidiary organs would be allowed to introduce specific adjustments in their reporting and recording procedures in the light of their established functions and of the questions dealt with by them.

38. Subsequently, in paragraph 12 of its resolution 37/14 C, the General Assembly urged more widespread observance of the guidelines set forth in annex II to the present document, on the part of subsidiary organs not entitled to written meeting records, which were requested to confine the contents of their reports to the Assembly to the following:

(a) Draft resolutions and draft decisions recommended for adoption by the General Assembly with, as necessary, concise statements supporting or opposing the recommendations;

(b) Matters meriting the Assembly's special attention;

(c) Details of voting, where appropriate;

(d) Decisions relevant to the subsidiary organ's own activities and procedures, which do not require action by the Assembly;

(e) Organization of work and, where applicable, brief mention of opening statements.

At the same time, subsidiary organs that receive meeting records were asked to avoid including summaries of discussions in their reports, unless such summaries were indispensable as part of the elements described in subparagraphs (a), (b) and (d) above, by referring instead to the relevant meeting records (para. 13).

39. In section II, paragraph 5, of its resolution 36/117 A of 10 December 1981, and again in paragraph 14 of its resolution 37/14 C of 16 November 1982, the General Assembly requested its subsidiary organs to ensure that their reports should be as brief as possible and should not exceed the desirable limit of 32 pages. Subsidiary organs whose reports exceeded 32 pages were asked, in resolution 37/14 C, paragraphs 15 and 16, to explain their non-compliance with that request to the Committee on Conferences, which was to report to the Assembly at its thirty-eighth session, inter alia, on measures to improve the implementation of the 32-page rule. In paragraph 5 of its resolution 43/222 C, the Assembly again requested that subsidiary organs should strive to keep their reports to the Assembly within the desirable limit of 32 pages. In paragraph 7 of resolution 45/238 B, the Assembly requested the secretariats of subsidiary organs to bring the recommendations of the Assembly on the desirable 32-page limit to the attention of subsidiary organs at the start of substantive sessions.

40. The General Assembly, in its decision 37/445 of 21 December 1982, endorsed the recommendations contained in the annex to Economic and Social Council resolution 1982/50 of 28 July 1982, in which guidelines were established for reports of subsidiary organs to the Assembly and the Council. These concern the contents of reports as well as rationalization of the reporting procedures to be followed.

41. Seeking to ensure the production of concise reports, the General Assembly in resolution 38/32 E invited its subsidiary organs to include in their

agendas an item on the control and limitation of documentation (para. 4) and requested the Secretary-General to examine ways of improving the drafting skills of Secretariat officials who were involved with the various phases of preparing final reports of United Nations bodies (para. 6).

2. Reports of the Secretary-General

42. In the case of the provision from sources outside the Secretariat of material for inclusion in a single study or report, the Secretariat would be assisted in its efforts to keep documentation within planned limits if the following procedures were adopted:

(a) The issue, by organs in which the request for the report or study originates, of clear directives as to the desirable form and length of the report or study;

(b) The casting of such requests, wherever appropriate, in the form of questionnaires, bearing in mind that carefully formulated questions tend to elicit pertinent replies and that the submission of material on the basis of responses to set questions facilitates their incorporation in a single document. This suggestion would be without prejudice to the right of such contributors to present their answers to the questions raised in whatever form would, in their view, be required in their particular case;

(c) An appeal to contributors in each case to endeavour to keep their contributions within the requested limits 4/ [resolution 1272 (XIII), para. 3].

43. In resolution 2292 (XXII), annex, paragraph (m), the General Assembly approved the recommendation that replies of Governments submitted in response to specific resolutions should, wherever possible, be grouped in one compilation or in periodic compilations, rather than issued as separate documents.

44. In administrative instruction ST/AI/189/Add.20 dated 5 January 1977, the Secretary-General directed that, unless the Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services and Special Assignments in exceptional circumstances agreed to waive the rule, documents originating in the Secretariat for submission to United Nations organs and bodies should not exceed 32 pages in length in their mimeographed version, i.e., typed in single space. (In terms of manuscript the equivalents are 44 pages typed in one-and-a-half space and 60 pages typed in double space.) That rule was subsequently endorsed by the General Assembly in section II, paragraph 2 (f), of resolution 33/56, in which the Secretary-General was requested to continue to apply to all action-oriented documents prepared by the Secretariat for intergovernmental meetings a limit of 32 pages, in accordance with internal instructions of the Secretariat. The rule, confirmed in the same terms by the General Assembly in its resolution 36/117 of 10 December 1981, was subsequently amended to set a limit of 24 pages (see below, para. 46).

45. In its resolution 1979/41 of 10 May 1979, the Economic and Social Council approved the following modifications in the form and presentation of its own documentation and that of its subsidiary organs:

(a) The 32-page rule would be adopted as the maximum permitted for the submission of all documents; this rule would apply to the documents as a whole, including any annexes and appendices that may be required;

(b) As a general rule, documents should contain not more than 15 to 20 pages;

(c) Historical introductions should be reduced to the minimum required to present background issues of substance;

(d) When a document was prepared on the basis of Governments' replies to a questionnaire or of submissions by the agencies and programmes of the United Nations system, such replies and submissions should not be reproduced in extenso in the body or in an annex of the document. Should the body concerned wish to see the texts of such replies and submissions, the Secretariat should make them available in the original languages and in an appropriate form;

(e) At the beginning of every document, a summary should continue to appear but the summaries would be improved in order to provide a comprehensive but concise description of the contents of the document;

(f) The practice of the International Labour Organisation of including at the end of each document a very succinct indication of the points for discussion (with a cross-reference to the relevant paragraphs) and of the main issues requiring intergovernmental consideration and review included in the document, should gradually be adopted, mutatis mutandis, by the Secretariat in the format of documents submitted to the Council and its subsidiary bodies.

46. In paragraph 2 of its resolution 34/50 of 23 November 1979, the General Assembly decided upon the application of the above-mentioned modifications to the form and presentation of its own documents and those of its subsidiary organs. One of the results of that decision was that, as in the case of the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary organs, the 32-page rule became obligatory for reports prepared by the Secretariat for submission to the General Assembly and its subsidiary organs. In a further effort to keep documentation within manageable proportions, the Secretary-General subsequently directed that henceforth documents originating in the Secretariat for submission to United Nations organs and bodies should not exceed 24 single-spaced pages in length (ST/AI/189/Add.20/Rev.1 of 24 February 1982, para. 2). (Twenty-four single-spaced pages are equivalent to 33 one-and-a-half-spaced pages or 45 double-spaced pages.) The Assembly thereafter, in resolution 38/32 E, commended the Secretary-General for his efforts in reducing the length and number of reports originating in the Secretariat and requested him to continue with those measures (para. 5).

47. In section II, paragraphs 6 and 7, of its resolution 36/117 A, the General Assembly also urged its subsidiary organs to reduce the number of requests for additional documents and to attempt to limit the number of reports required to cover any one subject of specific concern to a given organ, and requested them to consider inviting the Secretariat to make brief oral statements in lieu of written reports, in particular progress reports, at the outset of each session.

48. Thereafter, in resolutions 38/32 E and 41/177 D, the General Assembly returned to the subject of documents prepared on the basis of Governments' replies to questionnaires or submissions by the agencies and programmes of the United Nations system and recommended to Member States and specialized agencies that, when preparing their replies or submissions, they take into consideration the aim of achieving maximum brevity in setting out their positions (para. 2). At the same time, the Secretary-General was requested to attach to the questionnaires a reference to that resolution (para. 3).

E. Annexes to the Official Records

49. The General Assembly recommended by resolution 2292 (XXII), annex, paragraph (j), that the substantive departments concerned should strictly limit the number and length of the documents they select for inclusion in the annexes to those essential for the understanding of the relevant discussion. Further, as a specific point, no document which was already, or would be, printed or reproduced by the internal offset process should be included in the annexes. Equally, the inclusion of a document in an annex should exclude it from any separate printing or reproduction by internal offset later.

50. At the same time the General Assembly decided that the contents of the annexes and their production costs should be reviewed periodically by the Publications Board 5/ (para. (k)).

F. Supplements to the Official Records

51. The General Assembly also recommended, in resolution 2292 (XXII), annex, paragraph (g), that the list of documents intended for issue as supplements should be reviewed and approved periodically by the Publications Board.

52. In that resolution the General Assembly further recommended that all supplements should be considered for reproduction internally by offset printing from typescript, with the exception of reports of the main organs, volumes of resolutions and certain others which, for technical reasons, might not lend themselves to internal reproduction.

53. Finally, by the same resolution the General Assembly decided that the reproduction of supplements in both a preliminary and a final form should be limited to cases of strict necessity, for example, when a final version of a particular report cannot be produced in time for adequate consideration by the body to which it is submitted (para. (i)).

G. Documentation for treaty bodies

54. In its resolution 36/117 C of 10 December 1981, the General Assembly urged all treaty bodies, as a matter of priority, to review their requirements for documentation in all languages and for meeting records, with a view to adopting immediate measures to restrict substantially the present volume of documentation. The General Assembly reiterated its exhortation in its resolution 38/32 E, paragraph 12, whereby treaty bodies were urged to review their documentation requirements, with particular reference to summary records.

H. Documentation for special conferences

55. In its resolution 36/117 D of 10 December 1981, the General Assembly decided that, when special conferences were convened, particular attention should be given to harmonizing the proposed design of the conference with the documentation needs, so as to foster attainment of the stated objectives of the conference during both the preparatory phase and the conference phase itself.

56. In the annex to General Assembly resolution 37/14 B, entitled "Guidelines on Secretariat organization for United Nations special conferences", the task of integrating the reason for holding a special conference with the documentation produced for it was entrusted to a conference management committee, which was to take into account all existing rules on the control and limitation of documentation and to monitor the implementation of all documentation plans, especially in regard to the timely submission of documents.

57. The General Assembly also declared that the submission of national papers on the occasion of special conferences should be proposed only if such papers were intended to play an integral part in the preparatory activities and at the conference itself, taking into account the time required for the useful integration of such papers both in the preparatory activities and in the negotiating process of the conference, and approved the guidelines for the control and limitation of documentation for special conferences of the United Nations reproduced in annex III to the present document.

I. Statements of programme budget implications

58. Full use should be made, as regards proposals involving documentation, of regulation 13.1 of the Financial Regulations of the United Nations and of the relevant provisions of the rules of procedure of United Nations organs. To this end, the statement of the Secretary-General on administrative and programme budget implications, including the documentary implications, should always be submitted to the council, commission or other competent body in good time before this organ takes a decision, and its President or Chairman should duly draw the attention of its members to the existence of the statement (see General Assembly decision 34/401, paras. 12 and 13).

Notes

1/ The same request has been made periodically by the Economic and Social Council, notably in its decision 1983/163 of 22 July 1983. By the same decision, the Council also requested the Secretary-General to bring to the attention of intergovernmental and expert bodies, before decisions were adopted, any request for documentation that exceeded the ability of the Secretariat to prepare and process on time and within its approved resources (cf. para. 9 (e) of the present document). More recently, the Economic and Social Council, in paragraph 9 of resolution 1989/114 of 28 July 1989, noted that it was important to improve the quality and reduce the length of documents and to avoid overwhelming the Council with excessive documentation.

2/ Thereafter, by its decision 1980/133 of 2 May 1980, the Economic and Social Council reinstated the entitlement to summary records in respect of the Commission on Human Rights, commencing with its thirty-seventh session, and for the Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, commencing with its thirty-third session. By its decision 1982/105 of 4 February 1982, the Council decided to discontinue, for an "experimental period of two years, the provision of summary records for its sessional committees (First (Economic) Committee, Second (Social) Committee, and Third (Programme and Coordination) Committee)". That decision was renewed for further two-year periods by decisions 1983/184, section I, of 29 July 1983, 1985/200, of 26 July 1985, and 1987/179, of 8 July 1987, and 1989/174, of 26 July 1989. The provision concerning the discontinuance of summary records for certain subsidiary bodies, contained in subparagraph (b) of its resolution 1979/69, as revised by its decision 1980/133, was reaffirmed by resolution 1981/83 of 24 July 1981 and again, for further two-year periods, by decisions 1983/184, 1985/200, 1987/179 and 1989/174 and, for a further period of one year, from 1982, by decision 1991/295.

3/ On 21 June 1985 the Constitution of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) entered into force. Thereupon UNIDO became a specialized agency and its status as an organ of the General Assembly, established by resolution 2152 (XXI), ceased. The entitlements of the Industrial Development Board, as the principal organ of UNIDO, no longer flow from decisions of the General Assembly.

4/ The proposals endorsed by the General Assembly in this paragraph were those contained in paragraph 27 (f) of the report of the Committee on the Control and Limitation of Documentation (Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirteenth Session, Annexes, agenda item 51, document A/3888).

5/ The Publications Board is an interdepartmental body which, within the Secretariat, determines and ensures the implementation of the policies governing the preparation, production, distribution and sale of documents and publications.

ANNEX I

Current meeting record entitlements

I. VERBATIM RECORDS

A. Issued initially in provisional mimeographed form for limited distribution and later in printed form, with delegation corrections and editorial changes incorporated, for general distribution

1. Plenary meetings of the General Assembly

2. Security Council

3. Military Staff Committee

B. Issued only once, in final form, subject to corrections which are issued in consolidated corrigenda covering a session or a series of meetings

1. Main Committees of the General Assembly:

(a) First Committee

(b) Special Political Committee (on a selective basis only)

2. Subsidiary organs of the General Assembly:

(a) Committee on Applications for Review of Administrative Tribunal Judgements

(b) Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space

(c) Disarmament Commission

(d) Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

(e) Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Population of the Occupied Territories (when hearing witnesses)

(f) United Nations Administrative Tribunal (when holding hearings) a/

(g) Subsidiary organs of the General Assembly when holding meetings in the observance of international days of solidarity proclaimed by the Assembly

3. Trusteeship Council

4. Conference on Disarmament b/

II. SUMMARY RECORDS

A. Issued initially in provisional mimeographed form for limited distribution and later in printed form, with delegation corrections and editorial changes incorporated, for general distribution

1. Subsidiary organs of the Security Council:

(a) Committee of Experts established by the Security Council at its first meeting in 1946 (to re-examine and make recommendations regarding its rules of procedure)

(b) Committee on the Admission of New Members established by decision of the Security Council at its 42nd meeting, 1946

(c) Committee of Experts (to consider the question of small States and Territories) established by the Security Council at its 1506th meeting

(d) Committee on Council Meetings Away from Headquarters (established by decision taken by the Security Council at its 1625th meeting)

(e) Committee established by Security Council resolution 421 (1977) concerning the question of South Africa

(f) Commission established under Security Council resolution 446 (1979) (to examine the situation in the Arab territories occupied since 1967)

(g) Ad Hoc Committee established under Security Council resolution 507 (1982) (to coordinate and mobilize resources for the Special Fund for the Republic of Seychelles)

(h) Committee established by Security Council resolution 661 (1990) concerning the situation between Iraq and Kuwait

(i) Governing Council of the United Nations Compensation Commission established by Security Council resolution 692 (1991)

(j) Committee established pursuant to Security Council resolution 724 (1991) concerning Yugoslavia

(k) Committee established pursuant to Security Council resolution 748 (1992) concerning the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya

(1) Committee established pursuant to Security Council resolution 751 (1992) concerning Somalia

2. Plenary meetings of the Economic and Social Council

3. International Law Commission c/

4. International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination:

(a) Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

(b) Meetings of the States Parties

B. Issued only once, in final form, subject to corrections which are issued in consolidated corrigenda covering a session or a series of meetings

Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean

Commission on Human Rights and its Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities

Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment:

(a) Committee against Torture

(b) Meetings of the States Parties

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women:

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Convention on the Rights of the Child:

(a) Committee on the Rights of the Child

(b) Meetings of the States Parties

Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund

Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

General Committee of the General Assembly, Main Committees of the Assembly other than the First Committee and meetings of the Special Political Committee for which verbatim records are not provided

Governing Council of the United Nations Development Programme

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights:

(a) Human Rights Committee

(b) Meetings of the States Parties

Legal Subcommittee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space

Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Special Committee against Apartheid

United Nations Commission on International Trade Law

In paragraph 8 of its resolution 37/14 C, the General Assembly confirmed the provision of resolution 36/117 D, annex, paragraph 2, to the effect that summary records should not be provided to special conferences and their preparatory organs, with the exception of legal codification conferences, for which the needs would be determined in each case. Summary records are provided to review conferences on the implementation of multilateral disarmament agreements and their preparatory organs.

Notes

a/ In the language of the speaker only.

b/ The Conference on Disarmament receives verbatim records from full statements as delivered and checked by delegations concerned but without the use of verbatim reporters.

c/ Issued first in provisional form with distribution limited to members of the Commission and later incorporated into the Yearbook of the International Law Commission.

ANNEX II

Revised guidelines for the format and contents of the reports of subsidiary organs of the General Assembly

1. The new format of the reports would seek to present clearly and succinctly all the information that the General Assembly needs in order to review the work of its subsidiary bodies and to act on the recommendations made by them.

Chapter I

2. Matters calling for action by the General Assembly or brought to its attention would be given in chapter I. These would include:

(a) The text of draft resolutions and decisions recommended for adoption by the Assembly;

(b) A concise statement of any other issues requiring action by the Assembly, including the draft agenda proposed by the commission or committee for its next session. Each issue should be set out in a separately identified paragraph. If the relevant decision of the commission or committee was in the form of a statement of this issue, it would be reproduced in full; if it formed part of a more lengthy exposition, only part of which required action by the Assembly, then only the issue to be acted upon would be given. A cross-reference would be made to the relevant paragraphs of the report;

(c) Any other matters requiring special attention, such as proposed changes in membership, comments on the pattern of sessions, etc.

Other chapters

3. Each item on the commission's agenda would be given in a separate chapter, beginning with chapter II.

4. The account of proceedings would consist of a concise statement of information that the commission considered it essential to transmit to the General Assembly. The method of reporting would vary according to the nature of the commission or committee and the questions before it. One commission might conduct its work by consensus; another might have before it items that involved differences of opinion and numerous draft resolutions and amendments that it might wish to place on record.

5. The views expressed would not normally be attributed to particular speakers but would be summed up and presented collectively. Such forms as "Several representatives expressed the view that ..." and "The Commission noted with interest ..." would be used. When, however, the nature of the debate is such that it would be desirable to identify the speaker, this will

be done, normally upon the proposal of the Chairman, the Rapporteur or a delegation. Details of voting could be given as appropriate.

6. In the case of a commission or committee that conducts its work by discussion and consensus, rather than by adopting texts for submission to the General Assembly, any conclusion it reaches would be summarized and presented in chapter I, for the convenience of the Assembly.

7. The report would also contain chapters on programme objectives, decisions adopted by the Commission (other than those in chapter I requiring action by the General Assembly); and the organization of the session (opening and duration, election of officers and agenda). In the chapter on the organization of meetings a brief mention may be made of opening statements, with a reference in one or two sentences to their general theme. The statements would not be summarized at length, nor would they be given in whole or in part in an annex.

Annexes and appendices

8. Matters to be annexed should include the statements of financial implications of decisions taken by the commission or committee during the session and, if appropriate, a list of documents.

9. A commission or committee might also decide that the annex should contain the record of a discussion of a specific issue. The manner in which such a record would be prepared should be considered by the commission or committee, in consultation with the Secretariat, at the time when the inclusion of the record is decided upon.

ANNEX III

Guidelines for the control and limitation of documentation for special conferences of the United Nations

1. All measures to control and limit documentation in force at the time when a special conference is being prepared or held shall apply to documentation prepared for that conference as well as to any preparatory organ that may be designated.

2. Summary records shall not be provided to special conferences and their preparatory organs, with the exception of legal codification conferences, for which the needs will be determined in each case.

3. Whenever Governments are requested to submit national papers or reports, the following rules might apply:

(a) The organ which decides to convene the conference or preparatory organ, whenever it has been designated, should adopt specific rules to limit the length of national papers or summaries thereof, to the extent possible, and to determine the language versions in which they should be issued, taking into account experience gained on the occasion of past special conferences in the same area of activity;

(b) Each paper or report and each summary or abstract should be prepared in the format described in the layout appended to annex II to the report of the Committee on Conferences; a/

(c) A firm deadline for the submission of such papers or reports and their summaries and abstracts should be established, taking into account the purpose for which they are required in the preparatory process, but which in any event should not be later than eight weeks before the opening of the conference;

(d) All papers or reports received, as well as summaries or abstracts thereof, should be listed by the Secretariat in an information document and grouped in various ways, such as alphabetically by country, region or by subject;

(e) National papers or reports should not be redistributed at the conference site, if the conference is held away from established headquarters; instead, a library should be established at such a conference site which shall contain in single copies all relevant material pertaining to the conference;

(f) The Secretary-General should keep the total number of copies printed for this type of documentation under constant review and adjust it to a realistic level of demand.

4. Submissions by non-governmental organizations shall bear a uniform cover page with a document symbol and number provided by the Secretariat. It shall be the responsibility of each submitting non-governmental organization to make sure that this cover page appears on each copy of the report. The Secretariat shall then distribute such a report if it is submitted in a sufficient number of copies. Reports by non-governmental organizations will not be translated or reproduced by the Secretariat, nor will they be transported to the conference site by the Secretariat if the conference is held away from established headquarters. Furthermore, a deadline shall be set for the presentation of such reports to the Secretariat. A list of all documents presented by the non-governmental organizations will then be issued by the Secretariat.

Notes

a/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 32 (A/36/32 and Corr.1).